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The Active Site Topology of Aspergillus niger Endopolygalacturonase II as Studied by Site-directed Mutagenesis*

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Strictly conserved charged residues among polygalacturonases (Asp-180, Asp-201, Asp-202, His-223, Arg-256, and Lys-258) were subjected to site-directed mutagenesis in Aspergillus niger endopolygalacturonase II. Specific activity, product progression, and kinetic parameters \( (K_m, V_{max}) \) were determined on polygalacturonic acid for the purified mutated enzymes, and bond cleavage frequencies on oligogalacturonates were calculated. Depending on their specific activity, the mutated endopolygalacturonases II were grouped into three classes. The mutant enzymes displayed bond cleavage frequencies on penta- and/or hexagalacturonate different from the wild type endopolygalacturonase II. Based on the biochemical characterization of endopolygalacturonase II mutants together with the three-dimensional structure of the wild type enzyme, we suggest that the mutated residues are involved in either primarily substrate binding (Arg-256 and Lys-258) or maintaining the proper ionization state of a catalytic residue (His-223). The individual roles of Asp-180, Asp-201, and Asp-202 in catalysis are discussed. The active site topology is different from the one commonly found in invertase glycosyl hydrolases.

Pectic polysaccharides are among the most complex plant cell wall polysaccharides. In the homogalacturonan part, the so-called smooth regions, the 1,4-\(\alpha\)-D-galacturonic acid backbone is partly esterified. These smooth regions are interspersed by the rhamnogalacturonan parts consisting of repeating stretches of 1,2-\(\alpha\)-L-rhamnose-1,4-\(\alpha\)-D-galacturonic acid dimers. Other sugar residues can be attached to the rhamnose residues (1). Because of this complexity, a wide range of enzymes, the so-called pectinases, is necessary for the complete degradation of pectic substances. Two main classes of depolymerizing enzymes act on these polysaccharides: the hydrolases (endopolygalacturonases) and the lyases (pectin lyase, pectate lyase, and rhamnogalacturonan lyase).

Endopolygalacturonases (PGs; EC 3.2.1.15)\(^1\) catalyze the random hydrolysis of 1,4-\(\alpha\)-D-galactosiduronic linkages in pectates. They have been isolated from a variety of organisms (eukaryotae and prokaryotae). Furthermore, over 40 genes encoding PGs have been cloned and sequenced. The corresponding enzymes have been grouped in family 28 of the general classification of glycosyl hydrolases based on amino acid sequence similarities (2, 3).

The gene encoding the endopolygalacturonase II (PGII) from Aspergillus niger has been previously cloned, sequenced, and expressed in A. niger (4). The enzyme hydrolyses the glycosidic linkages with inversion of configuration (5). Recently, PGII was extensively characterized with respect to activity on polygalacturonic acid, mode of action, and kinetics on oligogalacturonates (6).

Two different mechanisms have been identified for glycosyl hydrolases: one resulting in retention and the other in inversion of the configuration at the anomeric carbon of the scissile bond (7, 8). Despite this difference, in most glycosidases two residues are directly involved in catalysis: a nucleophile and a proton donor. The average distance between the two catalytic residues has been shown to be about 5.5 \(\AA\) in retaining glycosidases and about 9.5 \(\AA\) in inverting enzymes, irrespective of whether \(\alpha\) or \(\beta\)-glycosidic bonds are hydrolyzed (9, 10). Moreover, crystallographic studies revealed that the catalytic amino acids are always aspartates and/or glutamates (11). However, site-directed mutagenesis experiments remain important in the identification of amino acids involved in catalysis.

Of the family 28 enzymes, the rhamnogalacturonase \(A\) from Aspergillus aculeatus and the polygalacturonase from Erwinia caratovora are the only members for which three-dimensional structures have been described (12, 13). Even though the two enzymes do not act on the same region of the pectic molecule, their structures, as well as the structure of \(A.\ niger\) PGII,\(^2\) do indeed show similar topologies, and many of the conserved residues throughout family 28 are located in the active sites of rhamnogalacturonase \(A\) and the polygalacturonases.

There are two asparagine residues strictly conserved within family 28, which could have catalytic roles. Moreover, other charged amino acids conserved among polygalacturonases are likely to play important roles such as maintaining the structure of the enzyme and establishing hydrogen bonding and hydrophobic interactions between the enzyme and the substrate.

For a better understanding of the mode of action and function of \(A.\ niger\) PGII in the degradation of pectins, site-directed mutagenesis has been carried out on the six charged amino acids (Asp-180, Asp-201, Asp-202, His-223, Arg-256, and Lys-258; sequence numbers according to PGII) that are conserved among polygalacturonases. Based on our results, we propose two aspartic acids to act together to activate the water.

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1 The abbreviations used are: PG, polygalacturonase; BCF, bond cleavage frequency; GalpA, galacturonic acid; HPAEC-PAD, high performance anion exchange chromatography with pulsed amperometric detection; HPLC, high pressure liquid chromatography.

2 V. van Santen and B. W. Dijkstra, unpublished results.

This paper is available on line at http://www.jbc.org
whereas a third aspartic acid serves as the general acid in PGII. The corresponding residues in the polygalacturonase from *E. carotovora* were identified in the recently solved crystal structure (13).

**EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES**

**Strains and Growth Conditions**—The strains of *Escherichia coli* used in this study were JM109 (14) and *E. coli* BMH 71-18 mutS (mutS::Tn10 Δlac-pro) thi E. [F’ proA B′ lacZΔM15]. The *A. niger* strain used was NW188 (pyrA6, prfP28, gaaC17, lenA1), which is derived from *A. niger* N400 (CBS 1204). Mutations were introduced into the plasmid pGW635 carrying the *pgaII* gene as a selection marker. Mutagenic DNA libraries were constructed by using synthetic oligonucleotides (Isogen, Maarsen, The Netherlands). Appropriate mutations were generated by using the Altered Sites II kit (Promega, Madison, WI) and synthetic oligonucleotides (Isogen, Maarsen, The Netherlands). Reactions were done according to the supplier recommendations with the following modifications. First, single-stranded DNA of the *phi*-pgaII promoter gene was inserted into the *EcoRI*–*HindIII* fragment of pAlter I. Second, following *E. coli* BMH 71-18 mutS cells transformation with the mutagenesis mixture, plasmids carrying the *pgaII* sequence were isolated and used as templates for double-stranded DNA. The *phi*-pgaII promoter gene fusion was recovered as an *EcoRI*-HindIII insert from pM3710 (6) and cloned into *EcoRI*-HindIII restricted pAlter I. The *A. niger* strain used for the mutagenesis was NW156. This strain was competent cells transformed with the plasmid pGW365 carrying the *pyrA* gene as a selection marker (17). Mutated PGII producers were selected as the same way as described for *pgaII* (18). Appropriate mutations were generated using synthetic oligonucleotides specifying the desired change (sequences available upon request).

**Enzyme Purification**—Mutated forms of PGII were purified to homogeneity as follows. Cultures of appropriate strains of *A. niger* were grown at 30 °C in 1-liter flasks containing 300 ml of minimal medium supplemented as described above. After 18–20 h of cultivation, the mycelium was removed by filtration over nylon gauze, the culture medium was diluted twice with distilled water, adjusted to pH 3.8 and applied onto a Streamline SP column (Amersham Pharmacia Biotech) previously equilibrated with 10 mM sodium citrate buffer (pH 3.8). After washing with the same buffer, the proteins were eluted with 10 mM sodium citrate buffer (pH 3.8) containing 1 M NaCl. The protein containing fractions were identified by measuring the absorbance at 280 nm, pooled, dia lysed overnight against 10 mM sodium citrate (pH 3.8), and loaded onto a Source S column (bed volume 11 ml, Amersham Pharmacia Biotech) previously equilibrated with 20 mM methyl-piperazine/HCl and McIlvaine buffers (pH 4.2) (20) to study the ionic strength dependence of each of the mutated forms of PGII.

**Determination of Kinetic Parameters on Polygalacturonic Acid**—Initial rate measurements were made in 50 mM sodium acetate buffer (pH 4.2) at several substrate concentrations. The reaction was initiated by the addition of enzyme and monitored as for the standard PG assay. Values of *Km* and *Vmax* were obtained by nonlinear regression analysis using the program Sigmaplot.

**Determination of the pH Optimum**—Incubations were carried out as for the standard enzyme assay on 0.25% (w/v) polygalacturonic acid using McIlvaine buffers ranging from pH 2.5 to pH 6. For the K25SN mutant, the reactions were carried out in pH adjusted distilled water containing 50 mM NaCl, and the pH of the reaction mixture was carefully measured at the end of the reaction.

**HPLC Analysis of the Hydrolysis Products of Oligogalacturonates**—Oligogalacturonates were isolated as described by Kester and Visser (21). Determination of bond cleavage frequencies (BCFs) for each mutated form of PGII was performed on 0.5 mM oligomers of different degree of polymerization (n = 3–6) at 30 °C. After different incubation times of 5 h or less, the enzymatic hydrolysis was stopped, and the reaction products were analyzed and quantified by HPSEC-PAD as described previously (18).

**HPLC Analysis of the Products Distribution after the Hydrolysis of Polygalacturonic Acid**—Each mutant enzyme was incubated with 1 ml of 1% (w/v) polygalacturonic acid in 50 mM sodium acetate buffer (pH 4.2) at 30 °C. After different incubation times of 0–24 h, the enzymatic hydrolysis was stopped as described (18), and the solution was diluted three times with water prior to HPSEC-PAD analysis as described (6).

**RESULTS**

**Expression and Purification of the Enzymes**—Asp-180, Asp-201, Asp-202, His-223, Arg-256, and Lys-258 were changed to try to investigate their role in catalysis by PGII (Table I). The amino acids introduced were chosen such as to minimize the risk of disturbance of the overall structure of the enzyme. The mutations of the mutated residues are depicted in Figs. 1 and 2.

**Specific Activity**—The specific activity of each mutated enzyme was determined in a standard assay and compared with the specific activity of the wild type enzyme (Table I). The data presented show that all mutations affect the PG activity. The examination of the specific activities obtained in 50 mM sodium acetate buffer (pH 4.2) reveals three different classes of enzymes. The first class comprises the most affected mutated forms of PGII (D180N, D201E, D202N, D201N, and D202E) (for H223C).

It should be noted that although the overall effect of each mutation is clear, the nature of the amino acid introduced also influenced the remaining specific activity of the different mutated forms of PGII (Table I). The most noticeable effect was observed within the different His-223 mutated proteins of which the specific activities in sodium acetate buffer range from 0.2 unit mg⁻¹ (for H223Q) to 21.1 unit mg⁻¹ (for H223C). Asp-202 mutated proteins were also affected, because D202E was 50–100 times more active than D202N in sodium acetate buffer and McIlvaine buffer, respectively. D180N was 6 times more active than the other Asp-180 mutated proteins in sodium acetate buffer.
acetate, but the specific activities of all the Asp-180 mutated forms of PGII in McIlvaine buffer were comparable. Finally, the amino acid introduced to replace Asp-201 only played a minor role because the specific activities between D201E and D201N only varied by a factor of 3–5, depending on which buffer was used. The reason why the nature of the amino acid introduced leads to a difference in the remaining specific activity of the enzyme is still unclear, but detailed crystallographic studies may provide further insights.

**Kinetic Parameters**—The kinetic parameters $K_m$ and $V_{max}$ for the hydrolysis of polygalacturonic acid in 50 mM sodium acetate buffer (pH 4.2) were determined for the wild type (6) and the mutated enzymes by measuring the initial reaction rates at different substrate concentrations. The results are listed in Table I.

All the other mutated forms of PGII exhibited higher values of $K_m$, ranging from 0.7 mg ml$^{-1}$ for D202E to 2.8 mg ml$^{-1}$ in the case of K258N.

As already observed with the specific activities, the effect on $K_m$ appears to depend on the side chain engineered as well as on the residue replaced. For instance, mutagenesis of His-223 resulted in enzymes with $K_m$ values ranging from 0.15 mg ml$^{-1}$ (H223A) to 1.5 mg ml$^{-1}$ (H223S). Changes in $K_m$ values were also observed among the different Asp-180 mutated forms of PGII. The only exceptions were enzymes D201E and D201N for which the $K_m$ was found to be 0.3 mg ml$^{-1}$ in both cases.

**pH Optimum**—The pH optima for the activity on polygalacturonic acid were determined using McIlvaine buffers in the pH range from 2.5 to 6.0, except for K258N. As this enzyme was not active in McIlvaine buffers, its activity was measured in pH adjusted nonbuffered solutions. The pH optima of the mutated enzymes varied only slightly between pH 3.8 and pH 4.1. Thus, the mutations only produced a minimal effect on the pH optimum of the mutated forms of PGII.

**Bond Cleavage Frequencies on Oligogalacturonates**—By studying the hydrolysis reactions of the wild type PGII on reduced and nonreduced oligogalacturonates, it was previously shown that the cleavage of the glycosidic bond in the oligomers occurs from the reducing end (6). In a similar way, the cleavage patterns for each mutated form of the polygalacturonase were determined using (GalpA)$_3$–6 as substrates. The hydrolysis re-

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**Table I**

Specific activities and kinetic parameters of mutated endopolygalacturonase II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enzyme</th>
<th>pH opt (McIlv)</th>
<th>Specific activities</th>
<th>Kinetic parameters (NaAc)</th>
<th>ΔDG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NaAc</td>
<td>MePPI</td>
<td>McIlv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>units mg$^{-1}$</td>
<td>units mg$^{-1}$</td>
<td>units mg$^{-1}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wild type</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2270</td>
<td>2140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D180A</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D180E</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D180N</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D201E</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D201N</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D202E</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D202N</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D180E/D201E</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H223A</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>ND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H223C</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H223Q</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H223S</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R256Q</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K258N</td>
<td>3.8*</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Determined in water.
actions were conducted in 50 mM sodium acetate buffer (pH 4.2) at an oligomer concentration of 0.5 mM. The BCFs thus calculated are presented in Table II.

None of the enzymes, including the wild type PGII, appeared to hydrolyze (GalpA)₆ under these conditions. The hydrolysis of (GalpA)₄ by each enzyme resulted only in (GalpA)₁ and (GalpA)₃, as already observed for the wild type PGII (6). A minor production (<0.5%) of (GalpA)₂ was, however, observed in some cases, when the reaction was allowed to proceed beyond 50% of conversion of the substrate.

Benen et al. (6) showed that the hydrolysis of (GalpA)₆ by native polygalacturonase II produced (GalpA)₁ and (GalpA)₄ with a BCF of 67%, whereas the formation of (GalpA)₂ and (GalpA)₃ occurred with a BCF of 33%. For the majority of the mutated forms of PGII (D180A/E/N, D201E/N, D202N, D180E/D201E, H223A, and H223S), the observed BCFs of the pentamer are comparable with those of native PGII. D180E, D202E, H223A, and H223S did not show any preference for the linkage hydrolyzed because the cleavage at the first and second glycosidic bond counting from the reducing end occurred with the same frequency. H223C displayed the most striking effect compared with the wild type enzyme because this enzyme hydrolyzed (GalpA)₆ preferentially producing (GalpA)₂ and (GalpA)₃ (BCF of 80%, compared with 33% for the native enzyme).

The hydrolysis of (GalpA)₆ revealed stronger effects on the BCFs because none of the mutated enzymes displayed an hydrolysis pattern comparable with that of the wild type PGII (Table II). Each mutated form of PGII exhibited a shift in BCFs in favor of the second and/or third linkage, counting from the reducing end. The most remarkable effect was once again observed with H223C, which hydrolyzed the hexamer producing (GalpA)₁ and (GalpA)₃ with a BCF of 84%, and only attacked the first glycosidic bond sporadically (BCF of 2%). For the majority of the other mutated enzymes, the cleavage at the first glycosidic linkage also occurred less often than in the case of the wild type PGII, favoring the attack of the second glycosidic bond, whereas the BCF at the third bond was unchanged. D180A, H223S, R256Q, and K258N were the only enzymes to display a clear increase in the hydrolysis of the hexamer into (GalpA)₁, even if the release of (GalpA)₂ and (GalpA)₃ remained predominant as is the case for the native polygalacturonase II.

The shift in BCFs for the mutated enzymes was also reflected in the product progression curves during the hydrolysis of polygalacturonic acid. For the wild type enzyme a product progression curve typical for endo-acting enzymes was observed (6). The mutated enzymes accumulated higher oligomers (n > 5) in a way similar to that of the wild type PGII. However, the rate of accumulation of smaller oligomers (n < 5) was different depending on the enzyme. Enzymes D180A/E/N, D201E/N, and D202N showed only small differences compared with the wild type enzyme with respect to the ratio of oligomers formed. More striking differences were observed with H223A(S/C), D202E, R256Q, and K258N, where a strong accumulation of (GalpA)₂ was monitored (not shown). These data correlate with the observed changes in the BCFs on pentamer and hexaoligosaccharides.

**DISCUSSION**

The data presented in this paper describe the biochemical characterization of several site-specific mutants of PGII from *A. niger*. The primary objective of this study was to investigate the role of the highly conserved residues in the active site of PGII.

**General Considerations**—All the residues mutated appeared to be very critical for catalysis. For each residue, except for His-223, a counterpart is present in the rhamnogalacturonase A from *A. aculeatus* (12). The basic difference between the polygalacturonases and the rhamnogalacturonases resides in their substrate specificity. Whereas polygalacturonases hydrolyze the α-1,4 glycosidic linkage between galacturonate residues, rhamnogalacturonases hydrolyze the α-1,2 glycosidic linkage between galacturonate and rhamnose. The common part of the substrate, the galacturonate moiety, will be accommodated at subsite −1. This subsite −1 is expected to display the highest sequence conservation. As a consequence, residues Asp-180, Asp-201, Asp-202, Arg-256, and Lys-258 should constitute residues of subsite −1 and the catalytic machinery between subsites −1 and +1. It is therefore assumed that the mutations do not affect subsites −4, −3, −2, +2, and +3.

The bond cleavage frequencies for a particular (mutated) enzyme do not necessarily reflect the real binding energy distribution over the subsites covered because the rates of hydrolysis of each particular binding mode may be different (22). Indeed, the bond cleavage frequencies only take productive complexes into account, thus the substrate must always cover subsites −1 and +1. Therefore any change of affinity at subsites −1 or +1 would affect any binding mode covering subsites −1 and +1 with the same ΔG change. However, changes in BCFs were observed that could be explained by the following. At subsite −1, the substrate moiety is generally thought to be bound in a particular distorted configuration to facilitate the
glycosidic bond cleavage (31), which results in a net negative affinity at this subsite. To compensate for this negative affinity and to properly align the scissile bond, subsite +1 binds the substrate with high affinity and thus allows effective catalysis. Any decrease of the affinity at subsite +1 may not allow for compensation for the negative affinity at subsite −1, and this would therefore result in less effective catalysis. Only by invoking subsite +2 would there be enough binding energy to compensate for the low affinity at subsite −1, and hence this would result in a shift of the BCFs. For affinity changes at subsite −1, the reasoning follows the same lines. Any change at this site involved in the binding of the substrate would decrease the rate of hydrolysis, because the ideal distortion will be changed. To compensate for this and to provide enough strain on the scissile bond to allow an effective catalysis, additional binding at subsite +2 would be required. Thus, the bond cleavage frequencies become meaningful when combining both the affinity and the rate of hydrolysis in terms of effectiveness.

**Importance of Arg-256 and Lys-258**—To evaluate the role of these two residues, they were substituted for glutamine and asparagine respectively, and the biochemical properties of the resultant proteins were analyzed. Among all the mutated enzymes studied, R256Q and K258N displayed the highest specific activities and highest $K_m$ values on polygalacturonic acid. Despite the high $K_m$ values, the mutated enzymes revealed the smallest effect on the transition state energy. It should be noted that for the calculation of the transition state energy for the wild type enzyme a $K_m$ value of 0.15 mg ml$^{-1}$ was used, which may result in an underestimation of the effect of the mutations on the transition state energy. In the crystal structure Arg-256 and Lys-258 are about 4 Å apart. This suggests that the residues may interact with adjacent galacturonate residues, occupying subsite −1 (Lys-258) and +1 (Arg-256). This is corroborated by the transition state energy difference, which is for both mutants in the order of an ionogenic bond. Furthermore, mutant K258N was severely inhibited by the negatively charged ions citrate and phosphate. Also, both mutations led to enzymes with a mode of action on oligogalacturonates clearly different from the wild type PGII, which is compatible with a mutation at subsite −1 or +1. It can easily be envisaged that the absence of the interaction between the substrate and residue Arg-256 or Lys-258 will change the geometry of the ideal distortion of the substrate, which will result in the observed decreased $V_{max}$. Taken together, these data strongly suggest that Arg-256 and Lys-258 are primarily involved in the interactions with the substrate.

**Role of His-223**—The (in)direct involvement of a histidine residue in the activity of PGII has been proposed several times on the basis of chemical modifications (23–25) and site-directed mutagenesis (26). However, there is no example of such a residue being one of the catalytic amino acids in glycosyl hydrolases. In addition, although this histidine is strictly conserved among the family 28 polygalacturonases, it is not present in the rhamnogalacturonase A from A. aculeatus, which belongs to the same family. As the catalytic residues are always strictly conserved within a family, this latter point definitely rules out His-223 to be the proton donor in the reaction catalyzed by PGII. The remaining activity of the His-223 mutated enzymes was extremely dependent on the nature of the amino acid introduced, which is in contradiction with His-223 being a catalytic residue. Inspection of the His-223 mutated enzymes revealed that all enzymes were severely affected in catalysis but that the bond cleavage frequencies did not change dramatically for enzymes H223A and H223S, when a small residue is

### Table II

**Bond cleavage frequencies for wild type and mutated endopolygalacturonase II**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enzyme</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>G</th>
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<th>G</th>
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<td>Wild type</td>
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<td>57</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>D180A</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D180E</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D180N</td>
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<td>68</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D201E</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>D201N</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>24</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>D202N</td>
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<td>62</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>D180E/D201E</td>
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<td>63</td>
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Assay conditions: 0.5 mM oligogalacturonates were incubated with (mutated) endopolygalacturonase II in 0.5 ml of 50 mM sodium acetate (pH 4.2). At timed intervals 50-µl aliquots were withdrawn and mixed with 50 µl of stopmix (2.0 mM Tris, 50 mM NaOH) to raise the pH to 8.3–8.5. Products were analyzed and quantified by HPAEC-PAD as described under "Experimental Procedures." The bold type indicates the reducing end.

**Km** Despite the high...
engineered. This implies that the relative effectiveness of the wild type enzyme and enzymes H223A and H223S has not changed, and thus the disturbance at subsites −1 and +1 is minimal, which indicates that His-223 plays an indirect role in catalysis. This role may be to maintain the proper ionization state of a carboxylate involved in catalysis by sharing a proton. Based on the crystal structure, this carboxylate could be Asp-201, which is the closest. The presumed role of His-223 is to facilitate protonation, which is important for catalysis most likely shares a proton with Asp-201, allowing this latter amino acid to be in the proper ionization state to protonate the product. Three aspartic residues in the polygalacturonase from E. carotovora were identified in the recently solved crystal structure, and Pickersgill et al. (13) the authors also proposed that the acidic residues corresponding to Asp-180 and Asp-201 in PGII are directly involved in catalysis.

A careful inspection of both rhamnogalacturonases and polygalacturonase structures (12, 13) revealed that the three acidic residues are very close to each other and that the distance in PGII between Asp-180 and Asp-201 (4.1 Å), Asp-201 and Asp-202 (4.9 Å), and Asp-180 and Asp-202 (5.7 Å) is not compatible with an inverting mechanism. Our data and the data obtained for the phage 22 tail spike rhamnosidase strongly indicate that nucleophilic attack and protonation can occur from the same site of the glycosidic bond in α-linked carbohydrates. It can therefore be stated that family 28 glycosyl hydrolases diverge with respect to their active site configuration from the generally observed active site architecture found in inverting enzymes.

To firmly establish the exact role of the individual acidic amino acids, it is important to obtain an enzyme-substrate complex with polygalacturonase II. The mutant D180E/D202E prepared in this study would be the protein of choice for the study of the enzyme-substrate complex structure.

REFERENCES